

Top tips, tricks to capture your property in its best light

When selling a home, excellent quality photos are critical in order for a property to stand out from all the competition, says Chris Cilliers, CEO and co-principal of Lew Gefen Sotheby's International Realty in the Winelands, particularly in a market where buyers are spoilt for choice.



Photo credit: Anton de Beer from Anton de Beer Photography

The new norm of self-isolation and online shopping/browsing have added to the import of this aspect in order to achieve the quickest sale at the best price, she says: "With so many properties on the market at the moment, you need to grab potential buyer's attention and the best way to do this is with a collection of good photographs that show your home to its best advantage.

"A meagre selection and pictures depicting mess and clutter will ensure your home attracts very little interest," says Cilliers.

Cell phone vs professional camera

Already well into the digital era, it's undeniable that many cell phones now have cameras that take excellent quality photos, probably better than one could take with the average decent Nikon or Canon a decade ago. However, the quality that phone cameras can achieve is limited, especially with whole rooms to capture, and no match for a professional camera, according to Anton de Beer from Anton de Beer Photography on the Garden Route.

“Quite simply, the hardware in an expensive camera is still superior to the hardware in a phone and the chip and optics in a dedicated camera will be able to record a wider contrast range, better sharpness and less lens aberrations and distortion,” says De Beer.

“Wide angle distortion with curved lines is a major factor. It’s called barrel distortion in most cases and using the wide angle setting on a smartphone will almost definitely give you that distortion.

“Yes, it can be improved with editing software like Photoshop, but I think when someone sees a photograph that differs a lot from that which the human eye sees, the photograph loses authenticity.”

Value of a ‘trained eye’

Another factor that many people underestimate is the value of a ‘trained eye’ and whilst not all budgets run to hiring a professional photographer, where possible it’s a must for a variety of reasons, he says.

“The biggest difference is that a trained photographer understands that what the eye sees and how the brain interprets the visual information, are very different.

“A professional knows how to overcome this visual “trick”. A good example of this is a property owner who has a beautiful view from his living area will focus on the view but wonder why the photograph portrays his lounge as boxy or too small.

“A pro will know how to compensate for this, with the end result being what one actually sees in real life, i.e, that beautiful living space opening up onto a vista.

“The layman also often does not understand the importance of using light to complement the subject - a professional fully understands how to utilise light, the word photography actually means 'writing with light'," explains De Beer.



DONT: Capturing the view whilst not detracting from the room's interior can be very tricky without a good camera and a solid understanding of how to use factors like lighting and depth. Photo credit: Anton de Beer from Anton de Beer Photography



DO: Modern interiors can be quite stark and minimalistic so in order to add warmth it's usually best to wait for a softer evening light. Photo credit: Anton de Beer from Anton de Beer Photography

Preparing a property for the photographer

Cilliers adds that good photos are not only down to the photographer, they are also very much up to the home owner: "The first step is one that sellers often neglect to do, or do so half-heartedly, but it's one of the most important – preparing your property for the photographer.

"This begins with decluttering and the best way to do so is with a thorough spring clean, starting from the attic down, which will rid your home of things you no longer need whilst clearing out storage space for items you want to pack away but not throw away.

"Don't forget to also clean out the garage and sort through all the toys and bikes with your children, putting aside things they no longer use to sell or for the local children's home.

"Next, de-personalise your home as far as possible, packing photos, kid's drawings trophies and other knick-knacks into your newly cleared storage spaces. Whilst your home should not look un-lived in and too impersonal, it's important for buyers to be able to imagine the space as their own.

"Outside, make sure the garden is immaculate and remove the pool cleaner from out of the pool before it is photographed," says Cilliers.

Professional tips and tricks

The house is spic and span and beautifully styled, but the budget simply does not run to bringing in a professional? De Beer shares a few professional tips and tricks to capture your home in its very best light:

- The most obvious piece of information is one that often is ignored. Slow down, don't snap away like a crazed person. You can take 100 pictures and still miss the essence of what you tried to convey. Look at the area, decide what you want to emphasise. What is interesting or appealing about what you're pointing your camera at?
- Successful photographs always show the subject at least as good as it is and generally strive to make it better than it really is, which is the core of advertising photography. But the photograph must honestly reflect the property. It's not to deceive the viewer, but to show the property in the best possible way.
- Natural or photographic lighting plays a huge role in the feel of a picture. Choosing different times of day can make a big difference. I often shoot a "weaker" part of the home in low or soft light to enhance the visual aspect, whilst still keeping the look natural.
- Photography is visual communication. What are you communicating? The space, the view, beautiful light, the opulence? Include what communicates those factors and exclude that which doesn't. There was a famous war

photographer Robert Capa who said: "If your photograph is not good enough, you're not close enough." Essentially, don't include irrelevant detail in your picture.

- Attention to detail is key - is the toilet lid down? Are there kid's toys scattered across the room? Has the dog "do" in the garden been picked up? Spend ten minutes extra and look at what you are actually seeing.
- And do what you can to not blur the shot! A steady hand or a tripod goes a long way to an end result that is appealing.

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